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THE NEW VIEW OF THE CHILD

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On Wednesday night of this week, I happened to sit at dinner by the side of a gentleman who lives in Brooklyn, and raises cotton in the Panhandle of Texas. We were discussing unemployment and the strange perversity of immigrants and others, which leads them to stay in the cities when there is crying need for their labor on farms and plantations. He waxed eloquent over the splendid opportunities afforded in his section of Texas. Negroes are not allowed there, and the field is clear for the native or the imported white; wages are good at cotton picking—as high this year as a dollar and a quarter a hundred—but even at sixty or seventy-five cents he assured me a man with a family could easily in two or three years rise from the position of a laborer to that of a tenant or landowner. And this is the explanation—that a man's wealth, that is to say, his income, depends on the number of children he has. I asked him how early the children began to work, and he said without hesitation, "At six and younger. I recall," he said, "one boy of six who earned 50 cents a day the season through." He had described the way the bag is slung about the neck and dragged on the ground behind so that the picker may use both hands. I inquired how big a boy had to be before he was strong enough to drag one of these bags, and he said, "Well, you see we make the bag to fit the child. I then inquired about the schools, pointing out that educational facilities were among the things immigrants like to know about when they are to be sent to a new country, and his answer was: "It is a pretty rough country. School is kept during the months when there is nothing to do in the fields. We let them go in planting time and cultivating time and picking time, and there are short terms in January and in July and August when there is no work to be done." "I admit," he said, "that is not ideal, but then there is a saying down there that ignorance and cotton naturally go together."

Finally I asked him, "And what is the effect of cotton picking throughout the season on the health and strength and growth of the children?" A thoughtful look came into his face (I honestly believe he had never thought about it before), and he said, "Of course it—it destroys their vitality." That he was himself an employer of child labor on a large scale, right down to babyhood, in a seasonal occupation, at piece wages, had never, so far as I could see, come home to him. He had apparently no compunctions of conscience. He was violating no law. He explained the whole matter and dismissed it from his mind by saying, mistakenly as it happens, "You see, there is no child labor law in Texas as there is in other states." It happens that there is a child labor law in Texas for mines, distilleries and factories, although none—and none in most of the states—except in the form of a compulsory education law—which applies to agricultural pursuits.

I have related this conversation, not as an evidence of child labor conditions in Texas—for anything that I know to the contrary, it may all be an unsubstantial fairy tale—but as an illustration, entirely outside the range of an immediate controversy, and involving—if it be true—that combination of Southern resources and Northern capital, which may be called typical, an illustration of the discredited view of the child against which, now in one form and now in another, this Committee and its allied forces, East and West, South and North, in state and in nation, are waging warfare.

You will notice that it is the bag and not the school term that is made to fit the child. The family income depends, not on the efficiency of the adult but on the number of children. The child is the center of the economic world and not the center of the educational and domestic world, and that means that the child is for exploitation and profit and not for nurture and protection. The six-year-old—think of it in terms of your own six-, eight-, ten-, twelve-year-old, if you have one—the six-year-old earns fifty cents a day and his vitality is destroyed. Cotton and ignorance are linked together—not naturally, as my friend said, but most unnaturally, and the industry which is otherwise the pride of the Southland and of America, is blighted not only in the mill but from the hour of its planting, joining the sweated industries of the northern cities and the glass works of the northern towns as an active cause of race degeneracy

and race suicide. Though it may be reprehensible for the race to perish for lack of births, it is a more shameful thing to destroy the vitality, to dwarf the minds, to refuse the natural and necessary protection of childhood to the children who are born into the world.

The other view—the new view of the child, if you like—has not been revealed by any single miraculous illumination. Would that some apostle on the way to Damascus could have a glorious vision of the divinity indwelling in the soul and body of the unspoiled child. But it is not so that social workers are guided to the formulation of their new ideals. Piecemeal and fragmentary is the process by which we put together the outlines of the society which we would create; doubtful and arduous the advance towards it. Social progress, as Meredith says, is spiral on a flat—like nothing so much as the path of the inebriate or the worm. The new view of anything, if it is a true and useful view, is likely to be but a synthesis, or a new interpretation, of old ideas; a convincing statement which we may all comprehend, of ideas long held here and there by a few people of extraordinary insight. It is not necessary, as Socrates thought, that philosophers become kings, or kings philosophers, but only that the speculations of the philosopher be put into language which kings may understand. We, therefore, we citizens and kings of America, not setting ourselves up as philosophers, in describing our new view of the child may justly appropriate some of the fragmentary older new views which have been gained from time to time.

Normal Birth

May I begin by urging the right of the conceived child in the mother's womb, to be born. When the Children's Bureau, for which this Committee is working, is established in Washington, it may well begin its labors by an investigation of sterility, abortions and still-births. If it be found, as our leading medical authority on this subject has estimated, that forty-five per cent of our unfruitful marriages are so, not because of deliberate refusal to bear children, but because of sterility resulting from venereal diseases; if it be found, as other specialists believe, that there is an intimate relation between the prevalence of such diseases among boys—the results of which are carried into later married life—and the employment

of boys in mills and factories and mines, then the connection of this painful subject and our child labor program will have been established. I refer to it here, however, not as bearing specifically on child labor legislation, but as a part of that broader conception of our obligation towards childhood, upon which this and many other movements depend.

The new view, the religious view, the social view, the physiological view, the rational view of the child from every standpoint, is that the right to birth itself must not be abridged. If disease interferes with it, then disease must be overcome. If deliberate crime interferes with it, then crime must be punished. If unscrupulous medical skill interferes with it, that medical practice must be brought more completely under professional ban and criminal prosecution. If ignorance and vicious indulgence interfere with it, then education at an early age by parents and teachers and physicians and others must take the place of our conspiracy of silence. If the employment of women in factories interferes with it, then that employment must be curtailed.

Physical Protection

The right to be well-born is followed, in the new view of the child, by the right to grow up. We are doing better than our forefathers in this respect. Two hundred years ago in London, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, three-quarters of all the children that were born died before the completion of their fifth year. Decade after decade that percentage has been pushed down until now it is something like twenty-five instead of seventy-five per cent.

Even now, in 1900, in the registration area of the United States, the death rate for all children in their first year is 165 in the thousand. That means, if I understand it, that 16.5 per cent. of all children born in the cities and more populous states, die before they are a year old. Milk poisoning, ignorance of mothers as to how to feed and care for their children, inability to nurse them, either for physical or for economic reasons, lack of necessary facilities for surgical and medical treatment, and lack of knowledge in the rank and file of the medical profession concerning the diagnosis and treatment of infantile disorders, are among the causes for this high mortality among infants. The greatest ad-

vances of medical science have been in this field, and the substantial reduction in the death rate of many communities is due to the saving of the lives of babies more than to reduction at any later age. It is the new view, the social view, that this process should be carried farther, and that those who are born shall be permitted not only to survive, but to become physically healthy and strong. The Children's Bureau, which is to be for investigation and publicity only, not for administration, will deal with that subject also.

The Federal Government should study continuously the problems of illegitimacy, infant mortality, illiteracy, feeble-mindedness, orphanage, child dependence, and child labor—just as it studies, and properly studies, the soils, the forests, the fisheries, and the crops.

Happiness

The third element in the new view of the child is that he has a right to be happy, even in school. Pestalozzi and Froebel helped us to think that out. Jane Addams, at one of the earlier annual meetings of this Committee, gave expression to the idea that one day we shall be ashamed of our present arguments for the prohibition of child labor, that it is physically destructive and educationally disastrous—although these seem like reasonably adequate arguments to start with—and shall recognize that the joyousness of childhood, the glorious fullness of enjoyment for which children are by nature adapted, and by their Creator intended, is in itself a worthy end of legislation and social concern. Bronson Alcott, of whom it is said that his greatest contribution to American literature was his daughter, says that a happy childhood is the prelude to a ripe manhood. It is a far cry from a childhood in mine or factory to that happy childhood, and to put it down as an elementary right may seem sentimental. If so, I name instead a protected childhood as absolutely essential, and if you grant me a naturally protected, a sheltered childhood, I will take the risk of happiness. For it is no artificial, hothouse-forced development of something which you and I might call happiness that we seek, but the spontaneous activity and growth of a protected, unexploited childhood. If you ask me what is the period of such protection, I cannot tell. Certainly ten years is not the limit, nor twelve, nor fourteen. I once asked a very wise and sensible man who had been

making some suggestions about my own boy's education, how long he expected me to support the boy. I had begun to be a little disturbed by the time it would take to carry out his program. "Well," he said, "if you can't provide for him until he is thirty-five, you are not fit to have a son." I am not in favor of raising the age limit to thirty-five, but neither do I favor leaving the years from ten to twelve, or to eighteen or to twenty entirely without protection.

Useful Education

It is a part of this new view, fourth, that the child has a right to become a useful member of society. This implies industrial—or stating it more broadly—vocational education. It supports the suggestion made by Mr. Noyes, in one of the publications of the National Child Labor Committee, that the school day might well be made longer, with greater variety in curriculum; and that the work which we deny, and rightly deny, in the factory for profit, may be demanded in the school for an hour or two or more daily for education and training. The disingenuous arguments as to the educational value of specialized long-continued factory labor may be tested by the willingness of those who make them to introduce genuinely educational employment with the element of profit eliminated, into the school curriculum, where alone it belongs. Industrial efficiency is diminished and destroyed and not increased by child labor.

The Right to Progress

There is one final element in the new view of the child, the right to inherit the past more and more fully, the right to begin farther and farther along, the right not only to begin where the parent began—even that is denied when through destroying the strength and retarding the education of children, race degeneracy sets in—the right which we now assert is the right not only to be protected against degeneracy, but the right to progress. It is the new view of the child, the American view, that the child is worthy of the parent's sacrifice; that he must mount upon our shoulders and climb higher; that not only in accumulated possessions, but also in mastery over the physical universe, in spiritual attainment, in the power to serve his fellowmen and to glorify God, he shall rise above his father's level. It is not a new idea.

Hector, on the plains of Troy, had a notion that men might say of Astyanax that he was a far better man than his father, and perhaps they did, or would have done so had Hector lived to protect and rear him. In a given instance the plan may fail, but the plan itself is significant for the father and for the child. The American child is not unknown in text books and essays and fiction. He has been pictured as smart, precocious, disrespectful, and offensive. The child of the rich and preoccupied American, and of the vain and indulgent American, has sharpened the pencil of the caricaturist of every land. Kipling, in "Captains Courageous," plucked such a child from the ocean and put him at the work on a fishing dory on the banks of Newfoundland, which his regeneration required. The neglected and spoiled child of foolish indulgence, and the neglected and spoiled child of avaricious poverty, tend to develop similar or equally lamentable traits. In neither case is there recognition of these fundamental elements in what we have called the new view of the child—normal birth, physical protection, joyous infancy, useful education and an ever fuller inheritance of the accumulated riches of civilization.